

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 21318

NOFORN

EO 11651: NA
TAGS: SREF
SUBJ: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES: VISIT OF AUSTRALIAN IMMI-
GRATION MINISTER MACKELLAR TO THAILAND

1. SUMMARY. IN A FIVE DAY VISIT TO THAILAND, AUSTRALIAN
MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC AFFAIRS MACKELLAR
EXPLAINED THE AUSTRALIAN PROGRAM TO RESETTLE 9000 REFUGEES
IN THE CURRENT FISCAL YEAR AND REITERATED HIS BELIEF
THAT THERE SHOULD BE CONCERTED ACTION TO RESETTLE REFU-
GEES ON A WIDER BASIS IN MORE COUNTRIES. AS A VEHICLE
FOR STIMULATING FURTHER RESETTLEMENT, MACKELLAR SUGGES-
TED A REGIONAL MEETING TO INCLUDE REPRESENTATIVES OF
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COUNTRIES OF FIRST ASYLUM AND COUNTRIES OF RESETTLEMENT.
THE MACKELLAR VISIT APPEARED TO BREAK NO NEW GROUND AND
IN THE ABSENCE OF AN AUSTRALIAN DECISION TO MOVE AHEAD
WITH A BROADER PROGRAM, THE MACKELLAR VISIT MAY HAVE
SIGNALLED TO THE RTG THE UNCERTAIN OUTLOOK FOR RESETTLE-
MENT OF SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES FROM
THAILAND TO AUSTRALIA. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING THAILAND VISIT, MACKELLAR VISITED THE BOAT REFUGEE CAMP AT LAEM SING, THE LAO REFUGEE CAMP AT NONG-KHAI, THE HMONG REFUGEE CAMP AT LOEI, THE CAMBODIAN REFUGEE CAMP AT ARANYAPRATHET AND THE CAMP FOR VIETNAMESE REFUGEES FROM LAOS AT SIKHIU. MACKELLAR MET WITH PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK AND FOREIGN MINISTER UPPADIT.

3. AUSTRALIAN EMBOFF INDICATED THAT IN SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSIONS MACKELLAR PRESSED FOR THAI SUPPORT FOR HIS PROPOSAL FOR A REGIONAL MEETING ON REFUGEES. GENERAL KRIANGSAK AND FONMIN UPPADIT BOTH INDICATED THEY THOUGHT SUCH A MEETING MIGHT BE USEFUL. CONSEQUENTLY, AUSTRALIAN EMBOFF THOUGHT THAT DEPENDING ON DISCUSSIONS IN KUALA LUMPUR, MACKELLAR WOULD MAKE A PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT IN MALAYSIA INDICATING THAT HE FOUND SUPPORT FROM ALL OF THE GOVERNMENTS HE VISITED FOR HIS REGIONAL MEETING PROPOSAL.

4. WITH REGARD TO THAILAND REFUGEE SITUATION, AUSTRALIAN EMBOFF SAID THAT MACKELLAR HAD IN FACT LITTLE INTEREST IN LAND REFUGEE SITUATION AND TRIED TO SKIRT AWAY FROM CONCRETE DISCUSSIONS ON AUSTRALIAN ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES FROM THAILAND. WHILE THAT WERE SUFFICIENTLY "POLITE" NOT TO ASK MACKELLAR BLUNT QUESTIONS, AUSTRALIAN EMBOFF BELIEVES THAI DID NOTE HOW VERY VAGUE MACKELLAR WAS WITH REGARD TO TAKING REFUGEES FROM THAILAND.
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5. ON THAT SCORE AUSTRALIAN EMBOFF SAID HE BELIEVES THAT THAI ARE RECONCILED TO FACT THAT MAJORITY OF NUMBERS UNDER THE AUSTRALIAN REFUGEE PROGRAM WILL GO TO MALAYSIA. HOWEVER, HE NOTED THAT PRESS REPORT INDICATED THAT MACKELLAR HAD IN OTHER CAPITALS SAID THAT OF THE 9000 NUMBERS FOR THIS FISCAL YEAR, 7000 WOULD BE FOR MALAYSIA WITH ONLY 2000 FROM THAILAND. WHILE MACKELLAR WAS CAREFUL NOT TO USE ANY SUCH FIGURES IN THAILAND, AUSTRALIAN EMBOFF SAID HE WAS CONCERNED THAT THIS MIGHT BEAR SOME RELATION TO CURRENT GOA THINKING. IF THAT WERE SO EMBOFF SAID IT WOULD MEAN THAT THE NEW AUSTRALIAN PROGRAM WOULD ACTUALLY TRANSLATE INTO A REDUCTION OF ONE HALF OF THIS YEAR'S PROGRAM LEVEL FOR THAILAND (4000 PERSONS). GIVEN THE CLEAR RTG SENSITIVITIES ABOUT THE REFUGEE PROBLEM, EXPRESSED PARTICULARLY BULARLY BY KRIANGSAK, AUSTRALIAN EMBOFF SAID THAT ANY SUCH REDUCTION IN NUMBERS FOR THAILAND WOULD BE PAINFULLY VISIBLE AND COULD SOUR RTG/AUSTRALIAN RELATIONSHIPS IN THIS AREA. HE NOTED THAT KRIANGSAK HAD STRESSED TO MACKELLAR THAT REFUGEES WERE BECOMING AN INCREASINGLY SENSITIVE DOMESTIC POLITICAL ISSUE AND THAT WHILE, AS PRIME MINISTER HE WANTED TO CONTINUE TO

ACCEPT REFUGEES, THAILAND WAS NEARING THE END OF ITS
CAPACITY TO ABSORB THEM. O'DONOHUE

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